

21st Century Voices in China

How the Impact of Globalization, Late Capitalist Development, and Advancing Technology is Interpreted by Three Figures in the Creative Industries



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Introduction

The undertaking of this project is to shine a light on an area that has remained somewhat unrecognised by academics and cultural commentators in recent years. This paper aims to contribute to an already existing discourse centred around postmodernism and development in contemporary China, of which a multitude of work has been created and added to the theoretical canon. In variation from the works that have been contributed thus far, however, this project will aim to evaluate new cultural trends that have been overlooked after the turn of the century. By evaluating three figures operating within the literary, artistic, and cultural circuit at the time of writing, this paper hopes to demonstrate that a spotlight for such cultural production does exist outside of Asia and that there are attempts being made to record and comment on it. The subjects of the paper have been chosen because of their commonalities that lie in the sense of uncertainty, ambiguity, disenchantment or restriction that is sometimes overtly and sometimes inadvertently expressed at the Chinese political regime in their works.

It could be argued that the three figures chosen represent marginalised/post-

colonial voices, however the goal of this work is not to drive forth the angle that literary, artistic, and cultural voices emanating from outside of Europe and America are necessarily disadvantaged. The purpose of this project is geared towards drawing parallels between nations based upon certain aspects of the global infrastructure. It is for this reason that the second chapter evaluates Wei Hui's novel *Shanghai Baby* under the magnifying glass of world systems theory according to the Warwick Research Collective's perspective in which the terms for global sectors formerly known as the first, second, and third world have been interchanged with core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral, thereby placing an onus on mass development as opposed to the static history of post-colonial pasts. This work will also utilise Fredric Jameson's 'Postmodernism and Capitalism in the Multinational Era', the comparative theoretical follow-up to 'Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism'. Prior to this publication Jameson had argued that the effects of global postmodernism would neutralise the individual impact of citizens on cultural output: this publication conveys that the increase of multinational power is a factor in the move towards unifying the themes purveyed through various strands of expression. The impact that multinational conglomerate power has had upon the structures of society feeds into output produced after the turn of the twenty-first century so much so that its influence on artists, writers, and entrepreneurs is entwined regardless of specific intention. In lieu of an overt commentary on political matters exists an atmosphere or climate in which both the lives of creatives and works are filtered into. The multinational era is therefore unavoidable in its enforcement of a co-dependent dynamic based upon influence and production.

This extract from Liu Kang—based on the modern predicament within China, as discussed above—perfectly highlights the reasoning behind the topic of this paper. It is included in its long form as Kang’s precise remarks serve to best exemplify the gap that this paper aims to narrow between modern creators in China and the lack of commentary provided on the subject so far:

By the end of the 1990s, there had been little intellectual excitement and few serious debates or controversies in the arts and humanities. This was by no means caused by cultural banality. On the contrary, by the turn of the millennium China’s cultural scene was filled with spectacles of sound and image, thanks to the rapidly growing electronic media and information technology: pervasive consumerism, with its values and images centred on material and instinctual desires, naked hedonism, and philistinism: domination of the Chinese urban youth culture by Hollywood and McDonald’s: rising resentment amid the disgruntled and dispossessed populace, coupled with a nostalgia for Mao’s era of egalitarianism; and increasingly assertive nationalist sentiments in the general public—to mention the most salient features of the contemporary cultural landscape. All of these urgently await serious critical analyses. Yet no significant critique of the current cultural trends has appeared, despite the prodigious expansion of intellectual outlets of journals, books, and conferences in the recent rush toward academic professionalization, which the Chinese academe in the humanities feel is all the more urgent. (The humanities in China today, like their counterparts across the

world, are the most valuable to institutional budgetary cuts and to lack of state and public support and financial resources during the current global economic slump.) But the anxiety or “aphasia” of the Chinese humanists results perhaps not so much from lack of public interest and intellectual and practical incentives as from political and ideological disorientation and dislocation. (Kang 2004, pp. 44–45)

Aspects of nostalgia can be found in all the efforts discussed in this paper as well as sentiments of dispossession, faux nationalism, anxiety, atomisation, and disorientation stemming from socio-economic and political situations. Again, these are themes that work to create a particular grouping of output that is reliant upon human response to uncontrollable and sometimes incomprehensible advancements. Themes of this kind are presented by the avant-garde artist Lu Yang—whom this paper evaluates in the third chapter — in the respect that the actual manufacturing of her work co-opts modern technological advancements alongside a unique critique of ideology and the production of discourse within society. Issues of gender, spirituality, the objectivity of science, and the validity of nostalgia are topics that punctuate her work. This paper will also discuss the cultural figure and entrepreneur Naomi Wu (a significant figure in the STEM community) in relation to the translation that has been imposed on her by others working in the tech industry overseas. This is placed at the beginning of the paper due to Wu’s ambition to remain in Shenzhen rather than being imprisoned or forced into exile: her will to partake in the global market that the tech industry is

so entwined with acts as a practical example as to why the subjects evoked in this paper are important.

1 | Cyborgs and Feminism

The Controversy Surrounding Naomi Wu (aka: sexycyborg), Feminism in Shanghai Baby, and Pseudo Nationalism in Gondola al Paradiso Co., Ltd.

This chapter will aim to analyse aspects of Chinese nationalism and censorship in conjunction with three aspects of Asian culture. Firstly, it will look at the figure of Naomi Wu and the situation that arose in regards to the questioning of her ability in the tech industry. The topic is relevant to the theme of this paper, in its connection to perceptions of peripheral/semi-peripheral nations as Wu is operating from Shenzhen and is restricted but also dependent on her output into the first world and the global economy extant on the internet. As she brands herself as a cyborg, the influence of Donna Haraway's text *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* appears as a derivative factor in creating the concept of using this term as a means to express such an identity. Leading on from this, the chapter will continue to branch into the topic of feminism relating to the banned novel *Shanghai Baby* by Wei Hui (which is dis-

cussed further in the following chapter) and the parallels between Wu, her status as a feminist icon, and the novel. Lastly, it will comment on a conceptual art piece that was displayed at the Venice Biennale in relation to the notion of national pride and how this is utilised as an economic force in regards to the Asian tourism industry, where constructed images of gender roles and work merge together in an effort to benefit the governmental designs of developing nations.

In March 2018, Vice offshoot Motherboard ran an article entitled ‘Shenzhen’s Homegrown Cyborg’, drawing attention to “maker culture”.¹ The piece was about Naomi Wu, who has become somewhat of an icon in within this community for what she describes in the piece as the juxtaposition between her ‘unusual appearance’ and her ability to construct innovative technological designs. Whilst the article ran in the Vice flagship publication in April of 2018, the original piece online originally contained a disclaimer at the bottom of the article providing brief detail of an argument that had arisen prior to the article’s publication which has since been removed. Since Vice have now removed all comment on the situation, it is difficult to put the pieces together as informatively as before. However, Wu has since published an article on popular opinion based website Medium where she reveals her side of the story.

According to the piece written on Medium, her issue with Vice editor Jason Koebler is that after being contacted by the company and agreeing to speak to

¹The creation and adaption of electronics, robotics, and 3D printing are common facets that are pursued in maker culture.

a journalist for the purpose of the article, she had made prior arrangements that certain topics should not be mentioned. This included information regarding her relationship status, which she is guarded about since there has been speculation as to whether her male partner is responsible for her projects and that Wu simply acts as a promotional face. This idea was most notably perpetuated by the founder of Make magazine Dale Dougherty, who stated over Twitter that ‘I am questioning who she really is. Naomi is a persona. She is several or many people’ (Dougherty 2017). He later issued an open apology over the Make magazine website which included an invitation for her to speak at Maker Faire Shenzhen (Make 2017). Wu has been subject to criticism from an array of voices that permeate from Europe and America, and as a resident in the PRC mainland the critiques she has received seem uneven due to the restrictions placed on the responses she is able to add.

Both Dougherty and Vice have placed Wu in a situation where she is being held to account by binary standards. On Wu’s own part she identifies (at least for the purposes of branding) as a cyborg feminist. She represents this through the embodiment of machinery and the rejection of the desire to be perceived as a Goddess. Conceptually she forges a link between herself and the 1984 work of Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto*. Although this is not a cutting-edge contemporary reference, Haraway’s work appears to be based on a trajectory in which it is revisited by a number of millennials and Generation Z at the moment. Only last year, former Rookie magazine writer and current MTV News journalist Hazel Cills wrote an article about the experimental guitarist Marnie Stern under the theor-

etical framework of Haraway's manifesto.² Haraway's essays in *Cyborgs, Simians and Women* capture the present changing work culture as well as highlighting the issue of marginalisation based upon gender and race. Her work is revisited here as it presents the apparency of the political, social, and economic climate today in regards to the figures discussed in this paper with an accuracy and foresight relevant to the modern climate.

It therefore seems apt to alter the dialogue into the terms that Donna Haraway suggested in her seminal text *Cyborgs, Simians, and Women*, published in 1989. The third part of the book reads as a disturbingly accurate, oracle-like prediction of the current state of affairs across the political spectrum. In her chapter entitled 'Biopolitics of Postmodern Bodies', she implores that new terminology such as the phrase '[I]nformatics of domination' will replace the phrase '[W]hite capitalist patriarchy' and that similarly the term '[T]ransnational capitalism' will replace '[C]olonialism' (Haraway 1991, p. 210). Debates around lexis have arisen due to the lack of progression in critical vocabulary within the broader societal sphere. Haraway's creation of the term 'Informatics of Domination' still (despite its creation nearly two decades ago) exemplifies the modern dependence on aspects of technology that have democratised (or, depending on perspective, are oppressing) people across all civilisations in subservience to the provision, circulation, and recording of information. Whilst this vocabulary is being used by certain tiers of society, it has not reached all levels. Consequently, debates around the use

²See Hazel Cills' article for reference: <http://www.mtv.com/news/2985461/marnie-stern-ten-years/>

of politically correct terminology present a veneer in a post-political state that is truly motivated by the economic necessity of surveillance and data gathering.

A major social and political danger is the formation of a strongly bimodal social structure, with the masses, with the masses of women and men of all ethnic groups, but especially people of colour, confined to a homework economy, illiteracy of several varieties, and general redundancy and impotence, controlled by high-tech repressive apparatuses ranging from entertainment to surveillance and disappearance (Haraway 1991, p. 169).

It is not unreasonable therefore that Wu's primary concern regarding the publication of the Vice article was the threat to her freedom. Should she be promoted extensively as being highly unique in her field she risks political safety and security in not being forced into exile. Joshua Cader notes in his study *Research on Chinese Social Media Censorship as Contemporary Archaeology: Notes on Time Sensitivity* the thoughts of an expert citing that 'Roberts, though she falls squarely on the side of "friction" being more important, readily admits that "the Chinese government focuses its intimidation efforts on high profile bloggers" while declaring this to be consistent with a friction strategy as it has downstream friction effects on the spread of information' (Cader 2016, p. 75). Wu faces a serious threat of being blacklisted as a dangerous activist (if she has not been already) as she is a high profile blogger. The article Wu penned for Medium primarily indicates her concern that Vice had breached some of her requirements and that as a consequence it

would place her in danger, Wu relates that '[P]ublicity in China carries great risk, but it also helps get me followers so I can afford to continue shooting for my channel' (Wu 2018). For Wu, this is important because it is the only way she can compete with the overbearing power of a globally centralised multinational informatics of domination. In Shenzhen, the Maker culture is predominantly D.I.Y. and as a result Wu's lifestyle comes under the same threshold as artists and musicians in the current economic climate.

There is an expansion in blue collar production meeting a white collar level of technological skill that China, as a former socialist nation, is proceeding to project. Haraway writes that she 'argue[s] for a politics rooted in claims about fundamental changes in the nature of class, race, and gender in an emerging system of world order analogous in its novelty and scope to that created by industrial society to a polymorphous, information system—from all work to all play, a deadly game' (Haraway 1991, p. 161). What Haraway deemed an argument previously in her text is not so much an argument today as a reality. Dougherty may not have specified the gender of those he initially believed to be behind Wu's work, the tweet did, however, demonstrate a lack of awareness regarding the fundamental changes Haraway lists in regards to 'the nature of class, race and gender in an emerging system of world order.' Wu's production of electronics exists regardless of class, race and gender.

Wu's use of an illegal VPN to upload her videos onto YouTube for the rest of the world to view globally presents friction between the entering of the late-

capitalist market as demonstrated and modelled primarily by core countries. A number of mainland Chinese residents have been using proxy services for over a decade to gain freedom of access online. This, as well as economic development and growing cultural immersion due to globalization in the multinational economic sector has meant that certain aspects and traits associated with Western society have bled into peripheral countries. In Wu's case, she is risking her own freedom to represent and correspond with other people within the Maker community. The situation mirrors the constant state of inner turmoil Coco in *Shanghai Baby* expresses due to the seemingly endless array of contradictory encounters and experiences she proclaims to have throughout the text due to her position as a native Shanghainese writer, and the opportunities, crossings, and interactions she has with the expat community residing in the city. She benefits from a creeping globalised economy and enjoys pleasures formerly reserved for core societies but questions whether or not this is responsible. At times she alludes to wishing for a past as known by those who experienced the cultural revolution. She possesses a heightened self-awareness which is encouraged by her immediate peers but, as she describes, this is somewhat frowned upon by wider Shanghainese society at large:

A swarm of affectionate, mutually dependent little fire-flies, we devoured the wings of imagination and had little contact with reality. We were maggots feeding on the city's bones, but utterly sexy ones. The city's bizarre romanticism and genuine sense of poetry were actually created by our tribe.

Some call us linglei, others damn us as trash; some yearn to join us, and imitate us in every way they can, from clothes and hairstyle to speech and sex; others swear at us and tell us to take our dog fart lifestyles and disappear (Hui 2001, p. 275).

The technological and electronic sector within China is not surrounded by the same symbolic, ideological structure based on status and achievement as has been the case in Europe and the U.S. In this sense China still retains the leaking of its former socialist status. In an article written for Newsweek on the Dougherty and Wu incident, Emily Gaudette notes that ‘What Dougherty and the other sexist Americans writing about Wu don’t understand is that Wu’s home of Shenzhen, China, has allowed femininity to exist at the intersection of technology and art’ (Newsweek 2017). Dougherty displays the sense of ‘foreigner’s superiority’ (Hui 2001, p. 96) that Hui refers to in her text. Like Coco, Wu also faces prejudice regarding her appearance. The following passage in *Shanghai Baby* could certainly be applied to Wu’s description of her ‘unusual appearance’ in the Medium article. Her phrasing here is tepid, however, perhaps due to the translation and that she may have in mind a wider audience who she does not expect to understand her issue. If she felt her position to be more stable and at liberty to speak without being undermined, it is plausible to imagine that she might have written the following sentences, exchanging the word ‘novelist’ for ‘maker’: ‘I became uncontrollably angry. Feminism reared its head. What was it that made me seem so like an empty-headed Barbie doll? Those men probably couldn’t guess I was a novelist who’d

just shut herself in her room for seven days and seven nights, and they probably couldn't care less either' (Hui 2001, p. 202).

It is interesting to note that Wu's Twitter handle (@SexyCyborg) indicates a differentiation between the types of cyborg that exist. The term "sexy" is constructed for online search optimization. In Haraway's chart of binary dichotomization, the term '[P]erfection' is replaced by '[O]ptimization'. Wu's "sexy" is a mechanical reproduction. It is a contrived and self-aware image, one which she credits for disrupting an industry standard. In terms of increasing her financial intake she has embodied the popular idea of what perfection amounts to in regards to standards that have been applied to the female body, but she also represents several layers of filter due to the content that her videos are concerned with—engineering rather than pornography—and that she is essentially an activist fighting against state censorship and control. Wu is optimizing the notion of organic, biological superiority as a representative of cyborg politics in order to maintain a stronghold with the global financial market, in this sense she is acting as a brand of multinational cyborgism. This, therefore, is not an authentic claim to sexiness. It is a way in which to monopolize the popular image of the female body according to pornographic industry standards whilst drawing attention to the fact that beneath every industry lies a business model, and that such a model can be replicated, emulated, co-opted and adapted according to individual or collective desire. As Haraway writes, 'Ideologies of sexual reproduction can no longer reasonably call on notions of sex and sex role as organic aspects in natural objects like organisms and

families. Such reasoning will be unmasked as irrational, and ironically corporate executives reading Playboy and anti-porn radical feminists will make strange bed-fellows in jointly unmasking the irrationalism' (Haraway 1991, p. 162).

Wu embodies both figures in this dichotomy and consequently raises questions of authenticity. The idea that there are several people behind the existence of Wu in relation to her success is not the real issue here, that she may represent a lack of dependable stereotypical ideas surrounding Asian marketplace tactics i.e.: Wu is not, in fact, a black market, counterfeit approach into infiltrating the global market orchestrated by a team of anonymous people. There are several people behind every global president but this does not cause speculation as to whether or not they should be held accountable for political decisions. That she has taken her appearance into her own hands whilst working with electronics is an incompatible facet of reality for Dougherty and many others within the maker community. It is the absolute denial of a return to an organic state or that an organic state was ever in existence, and that beneath the surface level concept of sexiness lies an incredibly mundane and exhaustive reality. Haraway defines how electronics are a practical representation of the question of authenticity: 'Micro electronics is the technical basis of simulacra, that is, of copies without originals' (ibid., p. 165).³

³The full passage of this definition is included here for further insight:

But these excursions into communications sciences and biology have been at a rarefied level; there is a mundane, largely economic reality to support my claim that these sciences and technologies indicate fundamental transformations in the structure of the world for us. Communications technologies depend on electronics. Modern states, multinational corporations, military power, welfare state apparatuses, satellite systems, political processes, fabrication of our imaginations, labour-control systems, medical constructions of our bodies, commercial pornography, the

Eventually, the object becomes reproduced to a point that all debate surrounding the original is redundant. The value of authenticity she represents is reminiscent of the work presented by Thailand at the Venice Biennale in 2009 named *Gondola al Paradiso Co., Ltd.* ‘The Southeast Asian artists at Venice interpret[ed] the 2009 Biennale theme of “Making Worlds” by probing the way retro iconography remakes national identity. Both countries [Singapore and Thailand] depart from previous entries by mixing real and imagined artifacts in dizzying installations that reveal nationalism to be a kind of performance’ (Cornwel-Smith 2009). Wu’s on screen activity is a performance that is directed at a stage of spectatorship who have failed to notice the connections between content, economic disintegration and its accompanying internal, ideological alterations. Just as *Gondola al Paradiso Co., Ltd* displays the common perception of national consciousness in Asia as being based around servitude towards the tourist industry, western spectators providing comment on the authenticity of Wu’s onscreen activity believe themselves to belong to a community in which it is apt to perpetuate such dialogue. However, due to the speed of development within postsocialist China, they have failed to recognise that this commentary is one that demonstrates its inability to cross through the looking glass:

The new machines are so clean and light. Their engineers are sun-worshippers
mediating a new scientific revolution associated with the night dream of

international division of labour, and religious evangelism depend intimately upon electronics. Micro electronics is the technical basis of simulacra, that is, of copies without originals (Haraway 1991, p. 165).

post-industrial society. The diseases evoked by these clean machines are ‘no more’ than the miniscule coding changes of the antigen in the immune system, ‘no more’ than the experience of stress. The nimble fingers of ‘Oriental’ women, the old fascination of little Anglo-Saxon Victorian girls with doll’s houses, women’s enforced attention to the small take on quite new dimensions in this world. There might be a cyborg Alice taking account of these new dimensions. Ironically, it might be the unnatural cyborg women making chips in Asia and spiral dancing in Santa Rita jail whose constructed unities will guide effective oppositional strategies (Haraway 1991, pp. 153–154).

To briefly expand on the oppositional strategies that Haraway writes of in this passage; Haraway considers this concept to amount to a revolt by those who formulate marginalised sections of society against those who fall into social categories that are in a dominant position of power. She credits this to Chela Sandoval writing that, ‘Chela Sandoval (n.d., 1984), from a consideration of specific historical moments in the formation of the new political voice called women of colour, has theorized a hopeful model of political identity called ‘oppositional consciousness’, born of the skills for reading webs of power by those refused stable membership in the social categories of race, sex, or class’ (ibid., p. 155). The long passage in which Haraway details the ‘new machines’, ‘the nimble fingers of ‘Oriental’ women’ and ‘the unnatural cyborg women making chips in Asia’ (ibid., pp. 153–154) is again absurdly predictive of modern civilisation’s current state of affairs. It

is interesting that she links the ‘the experience of stress’ alongside new industrial measures as the topic of mental health within the workplace has arisen to prominence in recent years. The notion of information overload can also be linked to this.⁴ Wu could be said to represent the ‘cyborg Alice’ she writes of whose constructed unity with ‘the cyborg women making chips’ (Haraway 1991, pp. 153–154) allocates her a representative position.⁵

Intimating in her blog post for Medium that ‘I am not a blind nationalist, but I actually do love living in Shenzhen and I have no plans to emigrate. I know it may be hard to understand, but I feel life here is improving every year, and I like using my YouTube channel to document my life, local tech, and personal hobbies’ (Wu 2018). There is a grey zone here that is likely to be more acutely identified once certain facets currently up in the air that amount to power structures have been cemented. Until it has been established whether or not open source software and systematic encryption is built into the majority of companies’ web infrastructure it is difficult to foresee whether or not the internet will be democratised in this sense.

⁴See Groes’ paper ‘Information Overload in Literature’ for further discussion of the implications of this in contemporary society.

⁵Wu’s qualms about her safety are not unfounded as she is prominently toeing the line of oppositional consciousness for a section of women working within the electronic sector in Asia. In this respect the issue of nationalism and patriotism comes into play: Wu’s assertion does not wish to be forcibly or covertly removed from China as a dissident supports the reasoning to suspect that Wu, without wishing to reject or compromise her values in dimensional account of China’s semi-peripheral status, is trying to highlight the struggle that Asian citizens face in the present situation whereby the State has one foot within the global economy due to the internet migration and the other rooted in the importance of maintaining an authoritarian state appearance. This is due to the contrasting forces that are in operation regarding the freedom of the internet. Wu is part of this movement, therefore she is aware of the cost that notoriety and representation from media sources will bring should she be deemed an activist.

Amazon is a monolithic capitalist force that offers advantages for bigger companies i.e.: cheap storage for web servers but there are alternatives for smaller companies (such as Backblaze) whose scale means that they do not need to depend on Amazon or set up a data centre. Philosophically speaking, should the demand for a free, uncensored and borderless internet be insisted upon by netizens this would essentially translate into a preference for localised, community-based politics, and for care and appreciation of the land occupied by the self at the present moment in place of frivolous relocation.

This action is somewhat ensured by the majority of the internet revolving around Linux-based operating systems as opposed to Microsoft Windows.⁶ However, as the relationship between multinational corporate influence and political power continues to thrive, this is more likely to have a negative effect following the description outlined by the head of the Thai Biennale selection committee, curator, critic, and Culture Ministry official Apinan Poshyananda: ‘Today’s globalization and global disintegration has revealed that the one world is crumbling. While advanced hi-tech communications and unrestricted trade give the appearance of seamless borders between megacities, it has become increasingly clear just how little the real world is growing together’ (Poshyananda 2009). ‘Globalization’ in this sense presumably refers to corporate expansion and the centralisation of power in this capacity. It is primarily this aspect of civilisation that leads towards conversations surrounding authenticity and causes reflection on how the

⁶See W3Cook: <https://web.archive.org/web/20150806093859/http://www.w3cook.com/os/summary/>

self is perceived as an autonomous being outside of such systematic constraints. Just as there are layers of censorship, multiple layers of cross communication as enabled by the internet contribute to a veil of illusion that upholds a variety of fictional accounts and personas, consequently courting the belief that all is fiction. The alienation that Haraway writes of is particularly relevant to the Wu and Dougherty situation here:

MacKinnon saw the construction of woman as the material and ideological construction of the object of another's desire. Thus women are not simply alienated from the product of their labour; in so far as they exist as 'woman', that is to say, sex objects, they are not even potentially historical. 'For women, there is no distinction between objectification and alienation because women have not authored objectifications, we have been them' (Haraway 1991, p. 141).

Both Dougherty and Wu represent subjects alienated from the inclusion of a World Wide Web infrastructure that is free from data-gathering methods and limitations. Wu, however, is attempting to author her objectification by taking control of her appearance and punctuating it into a male dominated industry. That this has raised questions in regards to her authenticity indicates a breach in the successful construction of becoming the object of another's desire. Materially she is so, but ideologically her decisive action to 'author' places her outside the qualifications amounting to a successful construction or build. Gondola al Paradiso Co.,

Ltd also entices the non-peripheral spectator into dream-like spending and investment by means of subverted desire. Promises of ‘social pleasure’ and ‘relaxing Thai sensibility’ were fed to the audience viewing the parody tourism agency that Gondola al Paradiso Co., Ltd presented to the attendees at the Venice Biennale that year. The exhibition piece was unique in that it also caught the early wave of the concept of post-tourism and the ‘trend for experiencing authenticity’ (Cornwell-Smith 2009). This is an area that has increased in popularity since the exhibition’s showcase in 2009. Shows on Netflix such as *Dark Tourist* encapsulate the culture that has arisen in recent years geared towards finding a perceived notion of truth amongst meta-facades of reality.⁷

Through parody of national saccharine sweet servitude, Gondola al Paradiso Co., Ltd acts much like the bite of a poisonous apple for those who have ever tasted a “clean” one. Again, this concept poses the notion of oppositional consciousness. When the apple found in the non-peripheral nation is traced back to the farm and the factory, it is discovered that it is not clean after all but sprayed with invisible pesticides so as to maintain its appearance in accordance with the demand for perceived hygienic standards. In order to comply with the demand for the keeping up of appearances, wide-scale industrial practices that are rooted in the cyclical production of goods are designed to create objects of inauthenticity. It is the alienation of such working practices that is the truth post-tourism seekers

⁷Dark Tourist focuses on investigating the phenomenon of travel being circulated around destinations that are associated with death, illegal activity and bizarre happenings. The show displays that there is a market (predominantly Western) who attempt to purchase experiences they understand to represent a concept of authenticity due to iconography in the 21st century.

wish to find. The feeling that there is a gap between object and authentic value has led to increasing interest in the culture of activism as well as a rising media focus on conspiracy theories and the truth behind images, magazine and newspaper articles, and videos. 'As Southeast Asia modernizes, it faces dilemmas in how to manage its past. The genteel traditional image Thailand projects to tourists jars with the country's messy, hybrid reality. That gap recently became more glaring with a military coup in 2006 and violent political division. The Land-of-Smiles mask has slipped' (Cornwel-Smith 2009). Gaps within semi-peripheral nations are between production, livelihood and the impact of war—within non-peripheral nations the gaps are between consumption, livelihood, and production.

Projection of an attractive national appearance is important to semi-peripheral nations as this is a crucial element that could work to either cement or dismantle the forging of progression into the global market. As Poshyananda identifies in their review of Gondola al Paradiso Co., Ltd:

National self-consciousness becomes fictitious and publicizes both desirable and hidden agendas that make Thailand one of the world's leading tourist destinations. From sun, sea, sand, sex, and servility to gastronomy, heritage, and the therapeutic massages. Such encounters force the spectators to make comparisons and blur reality and fiction for the sake of national promotion and the cultural industry. For a brief moment we are the spectators of ourselves as well and are seduced in the space of an imagined community (Poshyananda 2009).

The blurring of reality and fiction between the offering of pleasurable activities that can be consumed by the tourist highlights the trope of nationalism as a tool in which to gain economic advancement. Hence, Wu's claim that she is not a 'blind nationalist' is important to note, for the public iteration of this indicates that she is not prepared to adopt a mask that supports 'the land of smiles' but also that she wishes to help contribute to society with a sense of nationalism in mind.⁸

Gondola al Paradiso Co. Ltd also highlights the use of nostalgia as a capitalist weapon and the issue of censorship. If the past is presented as an adaptation in accordance with the importance of increasing prosperity through cultural production then it leads to the plugging of internet migration through censorship.⁹ Should an image be created in reality based around 'Staged authenticity [that] is reconstructed to tempt viewers into a spectacle, both real and imagined' (Poshyananda 2009) then society will move closer towards the hybridized control that fluctuates between multinational power and state power. Closing of the gap, not through sensationalism of national desirable or hidden agendas but through education surrounding production. This is a necessary facet in contributing towards the stabilization of value regarding cultural, artistic, literary, and philosophical output of citizens occupying residency in semi-peripheral and peripheral countries within

⁸Unlike the exhibition piece, however, Wu's videos do not invite or force the spectator to make comparisons or blur reality as there is no direct alternative mode of authenticity in which to compare to. Viewers are seduced into an imagined community but this is in fact one that they believe to be their own. Manipulation of unconscious modes of foreign superiority in the midst of late capitalist alterations renders the ability to possess national self-consciousness as an incredibly useful tool in which to gauge the force of global power structures.

⁹See Jason Daponte's article 'Taking back the Web' for further dialogue regarding this.

the canon of world-literature.

2 | An Analysis of Jameson's 'Postmodernism and Capitalism in the Multinational Era' in relation to *Shanghai Baby* and World Literature

This chapter will aim to evaluate and link one of the seminal texts written by the Marxist critic Frederic Jameson and the novel *Shanghai Baby* authored by Wei Hui. Having spent some time living in China himself, Jameson is regarded to have had a foremost impact on studies into postmodernism during and after this time, having introduced the theory to Peking university in Shenzhen in 1985. In 'Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' —the text he is most famously known for—Jameson predicted that developing modernism would render Chinese

citizens unable to control development due to the overwhelming force of global mass culture. Having written further on the matter in 'Postmodernism and Capitalism in the Multinational Era' it seems apt to discuss the work that has been most recently contributed to this area of academic study in correlation with the recent paper released by the Warwick Research Collective, *Combined and Uneven Development*.

Both works deal with the broader scope of the consequences of modernity in the multinational age. WREC's use of the terms core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral to replace first, second, and third world is useful in helping to neutralise the language used in discussion, as cultural and post-colonial criticism have attached certain connotations to the latter set of terms which render them as baggage rather than relevant lexis at present. WREC's invention of these replacements directs readers to lean towards acknowledging that each nation is in a permanent state of development in which the onus is on multinational power, preventing further theories being construed around the cultural-historicist perspective that the terms first, second, and third world lend themselves to. The idea that there is combined and uneven development which exists globally causes associations to be made with fluidity rather than the static positions that first, second, and third world dictate. The WREC paper is somewhat a work in progress itself as its writers are keen to broaden the scope of the theory as stated below—the purpose of this chapter is to offer a contribution to this endeavour in encompassing it alongside Jameson and Hui:

We are concerned to show how the idea of combined and uneven development works in the literary realm, and to consider whether it bears out our thesis on world-literature. We think that if what we propose can be shown to work in and through our chosen sample of works, it will hold relevance also for other works and cultural forms in which the modern world-system looms as a conceptual horizon (Deckard et al. 2015, p. 51).

Leading on from the subject of gaps, national authenticity, and the relevance of analysing aspects of the late-capitalist condition, it seems relevant here to steer this thesis in the direction of world literature. Inspired by the Warwick Research Collective's paper on the issue of World Literature ('Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of Literature'), this chapter aims to expand their theory into a broader 'cultural form' (ibid., p. 51) as well as literary and provide some further insight into Jameson's work in light of the statement made by WREC highlighting the issue that it may be useful for further research within the area to take into account two theses that were written by Jameson and that are somewhat entwined in demonstrating how dominant cultural logic—commodified, consumed, and celebrated—has come to a stand-still. This is rooted in some of the topics that have been outlined already in this paper such as the intermediate state of freedom and access regarding the status of the internet at present. The internet migration towards a broader awareness of open source software and further links that are made with cultural output both within the arts and within literature are entirely tied up alongside the present unpredictability as to whether or not information and com-

munications at large will be democratised in co-ordination with even development or whether it will remain ‘arrested in a kind of freeze frame’ as is suggested by the Warwick Research Collective (Deckard et al. 2015, p. 13).

The issue of translation is a presiding factor in the analysis of combined and uneven development, analysis into the production of publishing is an important aspect in determining certain underlying structural issues in regards to the monitoring of effective global distribution. Authors assigned to independent publishing houses are subject to dependency on promotional means based on online marketing strategies. This model of analysis is dependent on further comparison stemming from an economically deterministic position that could today be said to amount to market relativism. A globalised publishing force will struggle to manifest itself in a trade relationship with China due to outright governmental banning of independent publishing. The state have enforced discouragement towards the inclusion of western authors being marketed to children under fourteen and this attitude extends towards older generations too.¹⁰ This self-containment will lead to the preventative attempt of curbing the internet migration and decrease the algorithmic impact that Euro-American forces may have in terms of causing cultural and economic influence.

Without releasing further lexically defined political sub-divisions into the wider

¹⁰Chinese publishers have been encouraged to slash the number of picture books available for children from foreign sources. See ‘China Cracks Down on Foreign Childrens Books’ for further details: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/13/peppa-pig-pulled-china-cracks-down-on-foreign-childrens-books>

critical discourse, here there is a consensus and evidence of how the theoretical model applied to the notion of world literature is subject to the same structure that determines peripheral value. Therefore as economies merge into a strongly defined division between corporate multinationalism and small/local enterprise, the tiered structure that applies to the discourse surrounding the overall political and economic power of particular nations will find itself in accordance with the largest population rather than colonial dominance. Greater numbers to constitute a base and obliteration of the superstructure will create both a decentralised economy but also one that revolves around central state apparatus. The free market will render its subjects with more leisure time but it will also deprive individuals of privacy as it becomes globalised under the wings of a handful of multinational monopolies. In this sense globalisation continues its force under the guise of economic determinism when it is really the grid thickening its bars. As Laikwan Pang notes:

Naomi Klein points out that corporate sponsorship has colonized all parts of our lives, from large religious gatherings to small community events, including even private weddings. What we gain is not only financial sponsorship and material supply, but also the image and the new ideas provided. There is no longer an “outside” to the capitalist way of living if the dynamic process of creating is also commodified. The academic dilemma we face lies here as well (Pang 2012, p. 18).

Cultural production at the turn of the century has transformed alongside the global economy into a symbolic representation of the idea that consumption of art and literature is associated with individual status. Whilst efforts are still being made for the translated, written word to cross borders they do so at the expense of political investment or corporate sponsorship. It is clear from the banning of *Shanghai Baby* that no such investment was made here. Both Hui and the publishers of her text are regarded as falling into the dissident category, the content disregarded as nothing more than the influence of western debauchery. The English translated version of the text is unlikely to still be in print with a few remaining copies that can be found on Amazon. The situation itself proves that the endeavours of small enterprise (whether they are perceived as radical or not) can easily be quashed and directed to become reliant upon two forces: the state and the corporation. This is already the case for the publishing industry across the board in China due to the legal assertion that renders state publishing ubiquitous. Here, the relevance of Xiaobin Yang's assertion of the importance in acknowledging that the presiding factor which takes prominence in discussions centred around Chinese postmodernism and social culture is political authoritarianism, is echoed. He writes that '[C]ommericalism and cultural massification are burgeoning in China under, or even in complicity with, its overshadowing political authoritarianism' (X. Yang 2000, p. 393).

Whilst Coco may escape a forbearing political presence in *Shanghai Baby* as the novel's protagonist, Hui—as the author of the text—does not. Censorship, ex-

ile, and imprisonment are the issues that surround cultural production in China. In this sense, little has changed since the reign of Mao and Deng Xiaoping, the latter of whom continued the former's tirade into cultural production in correspondence with a supportive nationalist agenda. As Yang continues '... contemporary China, can be regarded as a system based on the production of discourses ... In terms of cultural production rather than production of material civilization, Mao's and Deng's ages do not belong to different political paradigms, even though they adopt different political schemes' (X. Yang 2000, p. 393).

If politics and culture are inextricably linked and material production is caught up amongst a representation of state apparatus, then all ideological forms that the superstructure comprises hinge upon the production of discourse such as Yang identifies. The lack of discrepancy between the two ensures that all topics within this sphere are now interchangeable, religion, art, culture, philosophy, media, and science blend together under a veil of postmodern fragmentation. This fragmentation is based upon a vision of late-capitalist globalization. However, the application of this structure in relation to China varies. Here, Jameson's theory of cultural dominance that is expressed in 'Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Capitalism' cannot be applied to contemporary China because '[T]he supreme discursive power that strives to maintain social and ideological homogeneity in China today is not imposed by the West but is, rather, controlled by the central political authority' (ibid., p. 392). This is not to suggest that the value of the paper is redundant, for the influencing factors that contributed towards the content Jameson wrote at

this time are still in existence and will remain so from a historical Marxist position. In regards to the future of publishing and literary production, the mutually dependent dynamic between multinational corporation and the state will determine the success of writers such as Hui. Those occupying residency in peripheral countries are especially vulnerable to corporate sponsorship that will aim to steer content through the punctuating atmosphere of a contrived global aura.

This aura is the same one that Walter Benjamin writes of in ‘The Age of Mechanical Reproduction’:

[T]o pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose ‘sense of the universal equality of things’ has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction. Thus it is manifested in the field of perception what in the theoretical sphere is noticeable in the importance of statistics (Benjamin 1999, p. 217).

Benjamin identifies the aura as representative of an object/subjects moment in space/time, for this is what renders it authentic. ‘Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be’ (ibid., p. 214). The continuance of a political reign in China that upholds the values of the cultural revolution following the presidency of Mao ensures that the mechanical reproduction of art and cultural artefacts are continually produced, absent of aura and instead burgeoning with cult value. Benjamin writes about this in relation to the film industry ‘The

cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the ‘spell of the personality’ the phony spell of a commodity’ (Benjamin 1999, p. 224). Through the banning of *Shanghai Baby*, cult value is extended even further to the making of a certain brand of celebrity for Hui. The text itself enters into a particular canon as a result of this and Hui joins the list of subversive creators. Her name is most likely banned from showing in Chinese search engines on the internet, but in Western countries she now represents another Chinese dissident who has fallen foul of the authoritarian government. Indeed, there are now so many that the status itself constitutes cult value.

A crucial aspect of Benjamin’s paper is the identification of the ‘importance of statistics’ as manifested by the ‘sense of universal equality of things.’ This extraction of uniqueness or aura is the political equivalent of communism, through late-capitalist reproduction localism is lost and consequently society sees the emergence of the atomised citizen; riddled with neurosis, uncertain who their neighbours are within high rise apartment buildings, isolated but never alone amongst an increasing population, and subject to the demands in which the expression of an opinion to put forth into a discourse productive to society is imperative. All this amounts to an emphasis on the appreciation of items: recognition of the aura in which Benjamin refers to is essentially the recognition of the value that a thing may have according to the individual experience of time and space. Acknowledgement of this idea would perhaps have meant that Coco would not, as the text presents, have spent so much time holed up in her apartment writing her novel—a

ritual that she puts great stock into because this act is an antidote to the political overshadowing of the Chinese state's enforcement that denies her the philosophical validation in which she is able to believe in the embodiment of uniqueness or 'the semblance of autonomy' (Benjamin 1999, p. 222). Ideology that teaches as so is frowned upon by elder generations. Through the act of writing, Coco seems to find purpose and strength in rising above the prospect of statistical value, all whilst acknowledging the bigger picture that surrounds her. She half-heartedly believes that she may be unique through publishers she is acquainted with. She is also fixated on narcissism, constantly checking herself when she feels guilty of it: '[T]his was my most vulnerable but also my most narcissistic moment' (Hui 2001, p. 107). Chastising herself for being narcissistic whilst feeling vulnerable seems like it would be detrimental to the stability of her mental health. This appears to be an issue that is skirted around, then dropped amongst a backdrop of immediately enthralling somatic pleasures that seem to manifest themselves through sexual prowess and the consumptive delights of the city.

Modernisation and its Impact on Mental Health

In further clarification of the topic regarding Coco's mental health as briefly mentioned in the preceding paragraph, many of her habits seem to be fluctuate between states of paralysis—i.e. staying in the apartment with Tian Tian for days—or opportune movement i.e. flying to Beijing at the drop of a hat to meet up with a

vague contact she has there. Arguably, this pattern of unconsidered flight is rooted in anxiety surrounding the city's modernisation. Pang's paraphrasing of Jameson highlights how this could be the case '... as Jameson stresses, no one can survive under the flux of perpetual change, and we all need a persistent identity over time to gauge our being. So the new is both desired and feared, not only by modernity, but by humanity in general' (Pang 2012, p. 39). Coco's narrative reflects a highly self-aware persona whose societal position is regarded as trash/linglei (Hui 2001, p. 275) by others according to her. The last sentence she utters, 'Who am I indeed? Who am I?' (ibid., p. 31), expresses a satirical sentiment that is directed at her own sense of narcissism. In 'Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism', Jameson discusses the work of Chinese writer Lu Xun, author of *Diary of a Madman*. He details how this text, through the theme of cannibalism, presents '... China, in a different sense, the terrible self-cannibalistic China of the "Diary of a Madman," whose response to powerlessness is the senseless persecution of the weaker and more inferior members of the hierarchy' (Jameson 2000, p. 325). Coco displays such self-cannibalism through her unflinching anticipation of opinions held by others concerning her lifestyle choices.

An interesting aspect of the text is Coco's apparent fixation on modernist writers such as Henry Miller, Freud ('The only theory of Freud's that I find convincing is the mystical link between the instinct to live and to die' (Hui 2001, p. 197)), and Milan Kundera. She bundles the fashion designer Coco Chanel—who she explains to her reader as a 'French lady who lived to be ninety' (ibid., p. 1)—in with

such literary influences proclaiming that ‘she’s [her] idol after Henry Miller’ (Hui 2001, p. 1). Her set of choice inspirations hail from core countries, and whilst Coco Chanel and Henry Miller bear little resemblance in the way of cultural output, they were both circulating strands of bourgeois society in the modernist era. Like Hui, Miller’s novels were banned before being published in the sixties for containing unsavoury content. Arguably Hui reveals herself to be writing in the semi-autobiographical style attributed to Miller when Coco is quoted as saying to her publisher, ‘Won’t it just feed the desire for novelty, writing about a vast and mysterious oriental country, and a young rebellious female author?’ (ibid., p. 111). Like Coco, sexual relations are of a primary concern in both Miller’s fiction and life and his writing takes place amongst modernising industrial advancements as does Coco’s. Her nostalgia for such a time is postmodern in its romanticism of such idols. She reveres the cult of personality surrounding these figures and elevates the modernist trope of purveying the private and libidinal self through writing. Evidently she aspires to a certain type of lifestyle, or simply (as she puts it) fame: ‘I wonder what I can do to make myself famous. It’s become my ambition, almost my *raison d’être*, to burst upon the city like a firework. This has a lot to do with living in a place like Shanghai’ (ibid., p. 1).¹¹

¹¹Coco’s ambition towards fame is not Western appropriation on account of her icons being listed as Americans and Europeans but is instead symptomatic of cult value stemming from late-capitalist materialism that just as easily transfers from East to West through reprinted posters of Che Guevara or Mao. That her icons are European and American is inconsequential in the age of mechanical reproduction. She attributes her aspirations of fame to the city of Shanghai, as this is a city in which she is able to walk to one of the counterfeit markets and find thousands of fake Chanel goods alongside various other reproductions of clothing, art, and furniture. Shanghai is a city in which Benjamin’s concept of aura falls flat due to the everyday statistical reality of overpopulation being a circumstance in which citizens live.

Reflections of social uncertainty can be seen in Hui's text by the very fact that despite Coco's acclaimed literary stardom she struggles to enjoy the same pleasures that are enjoyed by her expat friends. When she does it is in defiance of expected standards or at detriment to the stability of her mental health. Fundamentally, aside from the economic implications of a notable fall from grace should Western influence be filtered out of Shanghai, she doubts and wonders whether or not her heart really lies in socialising with her wider circle. Her secret lover, Mark, sees her as but a fraction above two dimensional and Coco is aware of this. However, she cannot overcome the barriers that would make her be considered as neither superior or inferior but equal. She is, after all, painfully aware of such perceptions that would render her a foreign doll: 'They called her 'foreign doll', a pet name Shanghainese give to girls who are fair and pretty' (Hui 2001, p. 140). She channels her energy into continuing with her novel so as to make her story her own. Through authorship she gains a sense of control over her situation and this in turn gives her the strength to continue with a lifestyle that she seems to rationalise is wrong. The frantic writing whilst listening to Marilyn Manson is akin to the behaviour of an addict and it is no coincidence that her partner, Tian Tian, is a morphine addict and painter. Tian Tian is quickly introduced as a character who arrives with his own set of issues as far as Coco is concerned.

Tian Tian is a former high-school drop out and a nihilist whose 'aversion to the outside world meant he spent half his life in bed: reading, watching videos, smoking, musing on the pros and cons of life versus death, the spirit versus flesh,

calling premium phone lines, playing computer games and sleeping' (Hui 2001, p. 4). However, Coco is able to put all of this aside but struggles to accept his impotency. 'Tian Tian just couldn't handle sex. I'm not sure if it was related to the tragedy that had caused his mental problems, but I remember the first time I held him in bed. When I discovered he was impotent, I was devastated, so much so that I didn't know if I could stay with him' (ibid., p. 5). She does however stay with him but is tempted into an illicit sexual relationship with another man, an expat whose wife and family reside in Germany. This brings forth its own set of problems which only seem to further exasperate Tian Tian's fragile mental state. Once he finds out about the affair, a newly rehabilitated Tian Tian quickly reaches for the escapism he finds in morphine once again and shortly afterwards dies in his sleep next to Coco.

The issue of gender and mental health is introduced through the character of Enchantress, Spider's (Coco's colleague) internet based friend. After meeting Spider by chance, on Huating Road years later, Coco is surprised at how much he has changed within the space of time that she has not seen him. She joins him for a drink in a cafe whilst they discuss his past and present situation. Coco enquires about a girl she assumed Spider was dating at the time that they were working together. Spider quickly corrects her, explaining that although she was a girl over the internet, in real life she is a male. Coco incites that because they pretended to be another gender over the internet that this person has a complex: "If he pretended to be a girl on the web to attract boys, he must have some sort of

complex,' I said. Spider retorts that '...he's been thinking of having a sex-change operation for a long time. I hang out with him because he's kind and smart. He knows I'm not gay, but we can be friends, right?'" (Hui 2001, p. 104). Coco does not dwell on the subject much further but it does draw attention to the prevalent cultural attitude concerning notions of gender non-conformity as being symptomatic of mental illness. Both herself and Tian Tian express mental health concerns that stem from the pace of modernity, rehab and therapy are treated as everyday consumptive items.

Tian Tian's death represents an apex of necessity for a subject who cannot or will not adopt the role of reproduction within society. There are two ways in which Tian Tian fails to reproduce, firstly in a physical sense: 'The doctor scribbled away on his diagnosis form. 'Your reproductive system is quite normal,' he said to Tian Tian 'the key lies in your mind' He recommended that Tian Tian join a psychiatric group at the center and take some medicine as a supplementary treatment' (ibid., p. 90). Secondly in the mechanical sense: Tian Tian only sells one painting throughout the text and even in this situation he does not sell it himself, instead sitting back and relying on Coco to act as his representative. 'With someone as shy as Tian Tian next to me, I had to be bold and confident' (ibid., p. 51). He is pleased when the 'laowai' woman (ibid., p. 52) compares his work to Mogdigliani and Matisse and incites Coco to offer her a discounted price in return for the compliment. Unwilling to reproduce art in the way that cultural workers did during the revolution, he instead submits to the subtle grips of emotional capitalism that

is associated with the cult of personality by immediately conceding to the flattery directed at him in comparison to famous painters. In this case Coco proves that he does have a price after all but that he needs to be cajoled into acting and joining in. His refusal to partake in the production of reproduction is a way in which to emulate a feeling of purpose, that anarchic refusal is more important than success.

In both cases, however, as the doctor informs him, Tian Tian's issues may manifest themselves in a physical way but there is no medical evidence to suggest that Tian Tian has a biological defect in regarding his ability to reproduce. Unable to overcome this Tian Tian must face death, for as Laikwan Pang notes, 'Creative labor cannot be substantiated as one's isolated toil, but is always embedded within the chains of industrial production and meaning production, processes which are much more complicated than the current concept of the author or artist can grasp' (Pang 2012, p. 65). Coco's brief foray into showing him what he could achieve should he try is not enough to spur him onto pursuing the selling of his work more. Without either the false consciousness of fame to motivate his survival or genetic continuation, he is silently removed from the text over the course of a passing of time that both the reader and protagonist do not observe. Hui censors his death by disallowing the reader into Tian Tian's inner world and denying him a death that is registered in its present moment of occurrence. She cements the impracticality of Benjamin's concept of an individual place in time and space by asserting that the concepts of aura and uniqueness are nothing more than the desire for confirmation of an individual's existence but that this is only ensured by societal status.

Coco dreams of writing a best-selling novel that will make enough money through sales to fund a trip around Europe: 'Travelling doesn't just give you a change of time and place, but to some extent it can also influence one's mental and physical well-being' (Hui 2001, p. 93). Unlike Tian Tian, she is not writing a novel as an authentic means of expression: she is writing it with capital and her place within society in mind. Her survival is, in this sense, ensured so long as she is motivated by a parallel global economic flow. Coco does experience a flash of self-doubt regarding her choice of career and although she does not directly express what she means by the text having an impact on her future, there is an implication that it will affect her status as a trustworthy citizen. 'The novel had brought me a new worry. I didn't know how to disguise myself effectively to my readers. In other words, I didn't want to mix my novel up with my real life, and to be honest, I was even more worried that, as the plot developed, it could have an impact on my future' (ibid., p. 105). Coco is clearly worried about jeopardizing her credibility should the novel be released to a hostile reception, the consequences being that she may be considered a dissident as Hui herself was after the publication of *Shanghai Baby*. As China advances its authoritarian status within the global village, the character of Coco in Hui's novel reflects her own situation.¹²

¹²The installation of the social credit system within China is part of a governmental strategy towards creating a structure that is based on the integrity of the individual. It goes hand in hand alongside a post-work culture, one in which in order to find work or gain capital through entrepreneurial means, as through funding payment systems such as Patreon or Kickstarter. These services are presently run by corporations/enterprises that are still somewhat independent of state control which means that individuals such as Naomi Wu are reliant upon the pseudo self-entrepreneurial illusion that has been perpetuated by neoliberal, late-capitalism. Through the introduction of the social credit system, governments are able to impose a similar structure that can be monitored and geared towards ensuring nationalism and patriotism. Through this method citizens are required to prove their trustworthiness through subservience to the newly adopted means of economic func-

Websites akin to Gumtree in which citizens are able to offer their skills as a service exist, however its members are rated according to the social credit system. Those with the highest rating within the area are the most likely to secure employment. This system is inherently flawed though as it is geared towards those already in hierarchical positions of power. As Liu Kang writes:

[T]he Internet is a critical arena in which new forms of domination, inequality, and exclusion fight with forces for democracy and justice. Such a battle is thoroughly deterritorialized, and China is no exception. The Internet in China, in short, is symptomatic of a culture and society in transition that seeks to redefine its identities, subjectivities, temporalities and spaces in a vastly complex, deeply entangled global network dominated by global capitalism (Kang 2004, p. 161).

Creatives such as Coco and Tian Tian in *Shanghai Baby* are particularly susceptible to the entrepreneurial economic model that follows the modernization process they are aware of through social and work-related associations. Coco professes that she does not know how to use a computer and takes little interest in this aspect of modernization. However, a reader today can assume that without a PR team willing to handle the online marketing and promotion of her completed novel, she (like all PRC citizens) will not necessarily benefit from global capitalism. Such embracement of this model comes at a price that Chinese citizens are tioning unquestioningly and will consequently be financially rewarded.

more conscious of than other nations due to the country's socialist background. Coco is worried about her future should she publish the novel because she fears being silenced.

As Xiaoying Wang identifies, 'Though only a minority of people in the world can actually benefit from the development of the global market—the capitalist mode of production always carries with it, wherever it goes, the class distinction as the condition of possibility of surplus value—ideological aspiration and the hope of affluent living in the Western style are shared by all' (Wang 2000, p. 96). This also goes some way towards explaining Coco's aspirations, defined by European and American figures, her desire to emulate a lifestyle as occupied by these figures is not rooted in the idolatry of Western culture but the desire to appear filtered, Photoshopped and iconic. It is a desire to exist outside of the global sectoring of poverty or at least to be known by others within a social sphere that she may not be able to access within her lifetime but that she knows to exist.

Moretti writes of a sense of sacrifice in relation to the equal distribution of world literature, stating that '[W]e always pay a price for theoretical knowledge: reality is infinitely rich; concepts are abstract, are poor. But it's precisely this 'poverty' that makes it possible to handle them, and therefore to know. This is why less is actually more' (New Left Review 2000). In *Shanghai Baby*, Coco is aware that she must sacrifice a part of herself, whether this is her nostalgia for a socialist past or human representation of a non-fragmented/non-globalised cultural unity. There is a feeling that in order to create a wider sphere, through travel

to Europe perhaps inspired by expat friends, that her own inner world is at times lost and instead replaced by general statements that summarize the national mood such as, 'Christmas isn't part of Chinese culture, but it gives the young, trendy crowd an excuse to revel to their hearts' content' (Hui 2001, p. 121) and '[T]alking to a German about football can make one feel a bit inadequate, but when it comes to philosophy, China's no slouch' (ibid., p. 110). Hui reflects a globalised, fragmented postmodern state in this way. The banning of the novel contributes to Moretti's idea of the text disappearing, to be replaced by a presentation of the system in its entirety. In regards to the future of world literature, the key will be in more combined studies that aim to balance a critical analysis alongside some treatment of close textual analysis as this chapter aims to have done. To sacrifice close reading completely in the name of the even development of world literature is to deny that there are unifying themes which can be drawn both from the broad application of texts and the capturing of certain textual moments that best demonstrate a present moment/aura in time and space that is unique to the writer.

3 | Digital Art in China

The Work of Lu Yang

Experimental art produced post-1989 in China is largely defined as avant-garde art. Artists who were active within this scene at the time were largely experimenting with forms such as performance, mixed media, and video. Many of them were reacting against the political pop art movement that was rooted in socialist values instilled during the cultural revolution which was also operating at the time. Fusings of Andy Warhol style paintings featuring Mao filled many an art district found in Beijing and Shanghai, where the purchasing of art for investment was beginning to become a market incentive alongside the increasing mood towards commodity fetishism. The two camps retain a division that is based on the rejection and embracement of Deng Xiaoping's politically focused materialism as the basis for the immersion of China into a centralised Euro-American economy. Avant-garde artists who chose to reject the political pop (deemed so due to its perception of dealing only with political issues) are rejecting pressure enforced by Xiaoping's

reform and opening up policies to partake in the international market in connection with postsocialist national values.

Works as such did not necessarily seek to transcend international influence but instead to merge cultural historicism with a sense of autonomous expression. Art of this ilk is still unofficially recognised within the PRC mainland due to the subversive, anti-establishment stance expressed by artists such as Gu Dexin and Wang Jianwei (both of whom now reside in Europe/North America) (Lu 2000, p. 155). Exile is again a running theme in regards to the perpetuation of overt expressions of anti-establishment sentiment and this forms the backdrop of the contemporary postmodern art movement today.

Whilst some experiments with new media at the time were made by avant-garde artists working in the latter part of the 20th century—such as those working with film and video—such materials were not as readily accessible as today, meaning that artists experimenting with such formats were often making a conscious choice in which to variate their own practice alongside new formats that were available but costly. In a chapter entitled ‘Global POSTmodernIZATION: The Intellectual, the Artist, and China’s Condition’, Sheldon Hsiao-peng Lu deems the generation of millennial artists producing creative output today as ‘post-ist’, defining it as a state that evens discourse through the ubiquitous experience of emptiness found through global capitalism.¹³

¹³Another manifestation of post-ism can be found through the reoccurring theme of arbitrariness which is a common trope within the contemporary avant-garde art scene. Mostly taking place online or using digital technology, this world is borderless for the majority of netizens. For Chinese

The separation from their nineties and early noughties postmodern precedents is due to their innate inhabitation of the tensions and societal fragmentations caused by commodification and globalisation. Such creatives are not only working within the context of a highly-technologised, multinational capitalist global system but are also eating, breathing, reading, writing, and sleeping within its sphere of influence. In this sense, political influence is therefore an unavoidable facet not only of the artistic work produced but of all else. Despite vocal rejections made by many contemporary artists who are interviewed about their work in the press, wanting to distance themselves from being forced to contribute to the political discourse, their work is produced and often dependent upon the circulation that is provided by multinational or state operated online platforms. Their content is not only made but also displayed within an overarching political sphere. All creatives who define themselves as artists are essentially working within a post-ist rather than postmodern structure today. The difference from Lu's description being that they embody the bankruptcy of global capitalism and in this way do not retain a sense of nostalgia for 'a pristine humanist discourse' (Lu 2000, p. 149). Such artistic works created after the turn of the century display a playful approach to societal fragmentation, often blending hyper-feminized aesthetics with hints of cryptic, deep belief systems.

netizens, the same can only be said under the use of an illegal VPN. The influences that were outlined in the passage extracted from Kang unites Chinese artists working with the digital medium alongside their generationally aligned, Euro-American counterparts. They are both consumers of the image and producers of their own. Self-branding is again a key factor in the comparative situations that currently serve to unite millennials and Generation Z across the developing nations of Asia and Europe and America.

Liu Kang identifies a section of the new urban youth known as “Xin xin renlei” (Newer New Humanity). This generation have largely been regarded as selfish both within Euro-American countries and in the East for desiring an existence as demonstrated by popular cultural examples of lifestyles conducted within — and with the support of—the mainstream media. Kang even goes as far as to deem this generation as ‘vague’ and ‘pleasure orientated’ in the following passage:

A self-styled manifesto asserts that “the Newer New Humanity is born at the age of globalization and technological innovation” and that its members consist of the middle class of the Internet and e-commerce specialists, cartoon-and-disco-loving-generation, McDonald’s, Coca-Cola, telemarketing independent workers, and avant garde artists.” The manifesto continues, “They are transforming the old values of life and relationships with their own lifestyles, in order to fulfil the goal of more humane and self-pleasing existence.” While the goal of this generation is both vague (“more humane”) and pleasure oriented (“self-pleasing existence”) it is clearly linked with the global (Western) trend (Kang 2004, pp. 150–151).

Consumer culture has been adopted by this demographic who ironically mostly do not consume items other than fast-food (which is cheap) and technology which is not necessarily a frivolous or pleasure orientated purchase but is often strategically geared towards being mandatory regarding a person’s societal position. This is precisely because of technological giants who hold a monopoly that even out-

weighs governmental capital and economic power. The ‘global (Western) trend’ that Kang refers to is nothing more than the average day to day activities used to pass time by a generation born ‘at the age of globalization,’ between the state of neoliberal late-capitalism and a post-work society. The common angle that is perpetuated by the media as a popular perception of this generation is that there is some choice involved in relation to having an inclination for such material matters.

Those who comprise Newer New Humanity are those in positions that are in the most direct competition with the section of core country residents. This demographic is unconsciously absorbed by a saturation of information themselves but are closer to its production. If the Newer New Humanity is comprised of ‘the middle class of the Internet’ their core counterparts are part of the same generation and in financially unstable positions as well. The performativity of being that is demanded by a neoliberal-capitalist economic model is the common factor here: performativity for those occupied with conspiracy theories is a reflection of the supposed world stage through which the control of lexis is paramount to power. As Terry Eagleton writes in his essay ‘Capitalism, Modernism and Post-modernism’, ‘[W]hether among discourse theorists or the Institute of Directors, the goal is no longer truth but performativity, not reason but power’ (Eagleton 1986, p. 134). The application of the perspective that all aspects of worldly affairs are a performance is but a display or performance itself in acknowledgement of the existence that such discourse is conducted by others. It is a means in which to mirror the acquisition of power, perceived to have been claimed by an inner circle

and a way in which to “Other” an ideological entity. The will to believe that there is a hidden knowledge that is only attainable to a selected few is a reaction to individual powerlessness incited by the disappearance of a once ubiquitously agreed upon cognitive map.¹⁴

The modern Shanghainese mixed media artist Lu Yang could be said to represent the Newer New Humanity demographic. Her work portrays themes such as spirituality, mind control, anime/cartoons, mortality, and neuroscience. Throughout her work there is an emphasis on the mind and body and, for this reason, her work is relevant to evaluate in connection with the topic of biopolitics, cyborgism,

¹⁴Nick Srnicek’s article entitled ‘Navigating Neoliberalism: Political Aesthetics in an Age of Crisis’ is relevant in the discussion of the sense of alienation that is associated with a deficiency of cognitive mapping has created a space between the consciousness of a social system and individual experience:

With the rise of globalisation, however, Jameson claims that this is no longer the case. We can no longer simply extrapolate from our local experience and develop a map of the global economic system. There is a deficiency of cognitive mapping, that is to say, there is an essential gap between our local phenomenology and the structural conditions which determine it. This separation between experience and the system within which we operate results in increased alienation – we feel adrift in a world we don’t understand.

The Dougherty and Wu situation as mentioned in one of the previous chapters relates back to this concept. Dougherty believed that there were a group of people behind the success of Wu, parallel to the overarching belief that there is someone ‘who is behind it all’ is a simulation of a top down structure of power. In its simplest form it is the manifestation of the desire for control. As irrational as conspiracy theories may appear, the place they hold in society is a relatively conventional one. Desire for control amongst societal atomisation and alienation within structural conditions (dependent on various factors) is the belief that political and social system are seemingly geared towards an already existing hierarchy. This is due to a point in time in which the discourse surrounding the issue of combined and uneven development has reached alongside the space in between cognitive mapping and globalization. Core countries are likely to contain a higher number of individuals who expound varying conspiracy theories as opposed to semi-peripheral and peripheral countries, due to citizens residing in core countries’ heightened susceptibility to the issue of information overload.

and technology. Her video 'Uterus Man' (L. Yang 2013) features an anime style character who rides a sanitary towel as a skateboard, as well as a pelvis chariot, through DNA structures and cybernetic systems over a background of techno inspired dance music. Anatomical parts are listed and described in brief textual synopses as though they have been extracted from a biology textbook. Uterus Man carries a baby weapon (a baby held by its umbilical cord) through space-centre like tunnels, eventually transforming it into a meteor hammer. He swings the baby around his head like a lasso until the baby is relinquished and he is left with just the umbilical cord that he uses as a whip. We then see Uterus Man seemingly gaining an unbearable amount of strength and power through placenta energy supplies. This is interspersed with the image of a cow eating innards. Uterus Man grows in size and becomes gigantic as the credits roll at the end of the video.

Yang subverts the desire for modernity in this work by reducing the body to a fragmented, technologised and imaginary status. Gender is fluid, whilst the notion of babies and the body being utilised as a weapon hints at a critique of governmental implementations to curb biological production in China (through the former one child policy). The video demonstrates the democratic will to use the body as a weapon if the individual so desires and presents a futuristic, technologically centred future in which this will take place. Yang confesses to being drawn to themes surrounding the body due to her interest in medicine. In an interview for The New York Times she is quoted as saying that 'The body is fascinating to me because it is totally objective. There is no right or wrong. That's why in my

work I don't indicate the value or the aim of things. I use a very cold and calm approach' (Qin 2015). There is an implication here that her work is constructed with a certain level of detachment from worldly issues and this is what marks her as representative of the Newer New Humanity. It is not through selfishness and narcissism that this generation evade overt political matters, masking reality with Coca-Cola and cartoons: rather that there is an awareness of the varying layers that the global political, economic, and social world is structured around. The objectivity of medicine and science is a sort of life jacket within an economically unstable epoch for millennials and the following generations.

Themes of asexuality and gender neutrality again arise in her video 'Delusional Mandala' (L. Yang 2015) in which Yang creates a digital non-sexual human simulator in the shape of her own body. This video is the second part of a trilogy in which Yang explores religious themes alongside neuroscientific concepts. This piece begins with a clip of Yang undergoing the process for the simulation, meanwhile a voiceover informs us of what a 3D scanner does. The naked simulated version of Yang proceeds to dance over a backdrop of electronic dance music whilst further neurological information is related to the viewer. Yang's simulation appears to undergo a fit of chaotic disorder in co-ordination with the narration imparting information about epilepsy, movement disorders, motor neuron disease, sensory hearing disorder, and endocrine function disorder. At nine minutes sixteen seconds into the video, her body is laid upon an MRI scanner as fire burns in the circle at the end of the machine. Viewers then see a clip of her body strug-

gling to move within the fire until she is transported into another scenario where her body continues to flail and struggle until it appears to be removed from its own organic control and placed into the control of a higher, omniscient structure. A clip of Yang's simulated body being adjusted according to size is shown as she walks through the fire. Her body fluctuates between small and large sizes before eventually settling upon an inflated form, appearing as though it is malnourished. Yang's body diminishes to leave a gurning, provocative, and deranged looking fleshed out head whilst her inner organs appear to be burnt out. The image can be found at eleven minutes and thirteen seconds into the video and it draws comparisons with such existing depictions of savagery found in texts such as Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In accordance with a break in the music and a change of pace, Yang's body is seen getting into a coffin which is then put into a hearse. Celebratory in style, her hearse/vehicle is decked out with a soundsystem, various gold ornamental objects, and a replication of her face in its deranged expression placed at the front of the vehicle. The last clip shows the back of the vehicle continuing its journey through the desert.

Supposedly a reflection on the nature of creation, the video indicates a further development on the subject of biology and technology. Yang wishes to present the Buddhist notion that our very existence as humans renders us equal in this sense, as well as highlighting the unnatural state of capitalist consumerism. Through the use of deep brain stimulation she attempts to extend what she considers to be 'delusions.' Religion then is a crutch or substitute for desires and emotions that

are typically unexplored outside of meditative practice. As mentioned, the juxtaposition between pop culture and deep-belief systems particularly permeates from Yang's work. There is a sense of wanting to be the engineer of the self, the accompanying imagery used to display this can be irreverent because until the apex of technological embodiment is reached, visual representations and dialogues are a substitute form as far as the bio-artist is concerned. The celebration of death that occurs in the final scenes of the video, indicate a reality in which death transcends both the spiritual and human realm to represent the lasting symbolism that is created by humanity in the sense that the individual leaves traces upon the planet. The decorated hearse portrays the idea that death and materialism are related, as life and materialism is. As the final shot best expresses, Yang presents the idea that ultimately humanity is surrounded by a barren landscape. 'Delusional Mandala' exemplifies the Newer New Humanity's preoccupation with transforming old values (that which can be found in the Buddhist religion in this case) and altering it in accordance with a modern lifestyle, i.e. one in which aesthetic and agnostic beliefs are prominent due to the increasing influence of core nations upon semi-peripheral nations.

Yang's assertion that an element of delusion exists regarding the human desire to believe in a higher being or purpose is somewhat of a juxtaposition against her belief in the knowledge that neurologically such constructs are rooted in symbolic and ritual value as opposed to the objectivity of science based ethics and knowledge. Evaluated in light of this, 'Delusional Mandala' suddenly becomes a piece

of post-ist art in that it draws attention to spirituality as part of a broader myth tied up with various humanistic, material constructs. As outlined in the preceding citation, concerning this topic, from Lu, post-ism is displayed in the work of Yang through the context of it being a product of ‘globalization in the late twentieth century’ (Lu 2000, p. 148). By default Yang’s work is worthy of study according to this comment as her work takes influence from popular culture and mass media whilst translating it into her own cultural output. Humanist discourse is entwined with the objectivity of science in ‘Delusional Mandala’ as well as popular culture rendering it part of a canon that encompasses acknowledgement of tradition and unavoidable engagement with the modern.

Commenting on the state of development, Pang notes that ‘[M]odernity continues to function as a structure of desire, and China, like many other non-Western countries, tries very hard to take the lead in this new wave of competition for modernity, in which creativity has now replaced science and technology as the object of desire and the symbolic benchmark of progress’ (Pang 2012, p. 14). Yang combines science, technology, and creativity in her work and like Naomi Wu is savvy in her approach in ensuring that there is a global appeal to her portfolio. The video ‘Cancer Baby’ (L. Yang 2014) depicts a hyper cartoonish landscape in which a multitude of cells bounce around happily whilst a J-pop inspired song plays in the background containing lyrics devised by Yang such as ‘We are happy cancer cells. We are living cancer cells. We stay inside your body. We are big family. Sister and brother. We grow up very very fast. Super super fast. You will never notice

that! We want stay with you forever. Mummy mummy daddy. Please don't kill us. If you don't like us anymore. You should never born us. Before you got cancer cells.' Yang personifies cancer cells in this video, giving them a voice in which the cells appear as the victims of modern technology and science. This does not seem like a critique of advancement in medicine, however, more as a playful approach that seems satirical.

'Cancer Baby' is interesting in that it reverses the role of the humanitarian question in society. It poses the issue as to what civilisation loses when it adopts progressive developments and when it actively seeks such things. Yang imagines the cancer cells as a family which runs parallel to Mao's notion of family values. Essentially the video presents the idea that cancer cells have a right to occupy the body as their existence runs deeper than perhaps the person who has contracted the cells. The matter of tradition and modernisation is of primary concern in 'Cancer Baby'. It significantly represents the Newer New Humanity grouping that Kang writes of in the previously cited quotation in which he details the manifesto of this demographic.

Whilst Yang evaluates the impact that deep belief structures have on civilisation and society as a whole, in contrast to Coco's character in *Shanghai Baby*, Yang has embraced the modernism associated with advancements in technology. Coco brandishes her lack of technical ability proudly whilst Yang consistently works with cutting edge technology in both the scientific and creative fields. Published in 2001, the novel teeters at the edge of the precipice of the height of the nineties eco-

nomic boom based around traditional industries and the altering global economic and political situation the internet migration plays a large part in. Coco feels as though she has a choice in being able to use and understand computerised technology. Unlike Wu and Yang she does not so much embody the new advancements but belongs to a generation that consists of widely mixed ability and varying roles within the corporate sector. The reader does begin to get a sense of the merging global economy when Coco observes that foreign women and Chinese women with ‘tiny waistlines and silky black hair [have] their selling points’ (Hui 2001, p. 81). She continues to place this into an entrepreneurial perspective stating that ‘[T]hey all had a sluttish, self-promoting expression on their faces, but in fact a good many of them worked for multinationals’ (ibid., p. 81). The sluttish self promotion she refers to is now a common facet of a post-work culture in which numbers of millennials and Generation Z occupy their own entrepreneurial endeavours in the way of managing their identities through social media accounts in absence of actually working for multinational companies. Both Wu and Yang are largely dependent on social media that allows them to reach a global audience and consequently partake in the global economy. The character of Coco in *Shanghai Baby* displays the doubt that may have been harboured by some of the Chinese population at the turn of the millennium in regards to the developing structures around them in terms of architecture as well as in the industrial and creative sector.

A passage of Hui’s that depicts this emotional conflict can be found towards the beginning of the novel where Coco recounts a moment between her and Tian

Tian ‘... all these signs of material prosperity are aphrodisiacs the city uses to intoxicate itself. They have nothing to do with us, the people who live among them. A car accident or a disease can kill us but the city’s prosperous, invincible silhouette is like a planet, in perpetual motion, eternal’ (Hui 2001, p. 16). For Coco, a disease like cancer has more to do with the people of Shanghai than structures like the Pearl Tower that magically transpire from the ground. Yang’s artistic interpretation of cancer as being friendly correlates with the notion of finding familiarity within bodily sickness rather than the sickness found in the bloated prosperity of the city. There is a shared sentiment between the two works that point at the city of Shanghai being a force of indeterminate power. Through the scenes of the inferno that take place amongst Yang’s simulated form in ‘Delusional Mandala,’ the bodily weaponry in ‘Uterus Man,’ and the friendly cancerous cells in ‘Cancer Baby,’ Yang attempts to reclaim the atomised version of the city and use it as fuel for her own cultural output. Like Naomi Wu, she wanders into Haraway’s world of cyborgism in fearless grasping and unique use of the modern technology that surrounds her. As Lu notes, ‘[T]he new generation of filmmakers, photographers, and video artists rightfully claim the modern Chinese city as their own. In representing the construction and demolition of urban space through their own media, they evoke the memories, nostalgia, intimacy, affect, and habits of life associated with the old city, and at the same time project new zones of hopes, desires, and dreams in the rapidly changing social landscape’ (Lu 2007, p. 169). Yang certainly fits this bill whereas the character of Coco in *Shanghai Baby* seems to alternately shy away as well as partake in the changing landscape. She feels as though she is under criti-

cism by an older generation for living an amoral lifestyle and is also exempt from the kind of successes she believes foreigners to enjoy. Resenting her position as linglei she exists on the verge of industrial capitalism and technocapitalism, unable to quite find a foot within either of the associated developing careers that rest alongside these forces.

Conclusion

The purpose and intent of this work has been to provoke a dialogue circulating around creatives working from the margins as they lack a mainstream platform to contribute their voices to. Undoubtedly there are facets related to the issues and matters that this paper has brought up which have been overlooked due the need to condense the material of this project for the purpose of academic requirements. For example, the matter of counterfeit ideology as shown by the artist Miao Ying in her recreation of a website that appears at surface level to be a phishing hook but is instead a piece of art would have been relevant to add to this work as it best highlights how tales of counterfeit Chinese products and Chinese hackers are part of the media-driven regime dependent on a perpetual circulation of discourse (Ying 2016). However, it should be clear from the figures and works that have been discussed that the turn of the millennium has brought the increasing escalation of media. The impact that scientific and industrial advancements have had on humanity is continuously worthy of analysis. Alongside the objective progress made in science and technology are the works of creatives who mirror the com-

plexities and changing landscapes through their own output of expression.

Financially speaking, China is predominantly known for its production of material goods: there is a crop of European and American children born in the 1980s who received toys at every birthday and Christmas containing the words “made in China” welded somewhere into the plastic. Public perception of China as the core of the counterfeit market through both e-commerce and physical black markets sustains in the twenty-first century. It is therefore important that academics, journalists, and general cultural commentators take it upon themselves to help shape and even out this perception with a view of the contemporary literary, artistic, and cultural scene that exists today. China’s major cities are technocratic metropolises home to some of the world’s largest multinational corporations. Yet China has not gained status as a core nation unlike America and parts of Europe due to the feeling that whilst economic advancements have occurred, political instability is still rife due to perceived authoritarian measures taken by the government at times. The notion of the Great Firewall of China is a prevalent issue that lends itself to criticisms from outside nations that citizens are being silenced, censored, and surveilled more than elsewhere in the world. It is necessary for Chinese citizens to use virtual private networks and consequently break the law in order to access certain media channels that are ubiquitous in Europe and America. Economically this puts creatives at a disadvantage whilst the world’s arts and culture appear to be centred in these areas. Politically however, the emergence of various social media outlets acting as a surface for an underbelly of data-gathering is not unique to China but

applies to Western media outlets too. In this respect the Chinese government are protecting its citizens from being susceptible to foreign data compilation.

This effort to maintain a localization of sorts is what is causing the nation to sit on the precipice of future uncertainty in regards to its positioning within the world system as Core nations move towards an increasing dependency upon the economic integration of self-branding as caused by overriding private industries in place of national industries and the strengthening military structures that continue in their crusade for opacity between Europe and America. Millennials and Generation Z are caught up in the onset of a post-work culture that citizens such as Naomi Wu have experienced first hand as they watched the closing of central factories take place, only to pick up the pieces through the making of tech products that appeal in their novelty to netizens. This paper has placed some focus on the notion of the internet migration in relation to post-work culture and certainly this area requires further research in co-ordination with movements made by governments and multinational corporations such as Microsoft, Amazon, and Apple that appear omniscient in their injections into a global network infrastructure. Indeed, even those working to seek open source alternatives within the tech industry are often reduced to falling back on pre-existing technical infrastructure provided by these companies. Education and livelihoods that exist outside of a performative sphere in which such powers are central are integral to the freedom and democracy of all global citizens. Decentralisation of these forces and enforcement of transparency in practices such as data gathering and the production of goods out-

side of core nations needs to be understood by those existing outside of an elite, plutocratic framework so that development becomes closer to an even state than at present. If this reality does not occur there is an increasing likelihood that art, literature, and culture will become spaces prone to further state observation, and that efforts made to ensure that such expressions are in line with national values and/or corporate sponsorship will become even more apparent both within and outside of China.

This paper hopes to have shown that the purpose of the global subject in the twenty-first century is to record, provide comment, create, produce, and break through the layers of performativity that attack us through advertising, threat of poverty, threat of unpopularity (a structure in which the social credit system is geared towards), and the threat of failure in various respects. Career, appearance, social-life: all of these facets are actively wielded as weapons for those existing within the age of materialism. In correlation with this there are burgeoning industries such as psychotherapy, yoga, health food, and vitamins/holistic advice that profit from perceived mental health problems such as feelings of anxiety and depression (as Coco and Tian Tian experience in *Shanghai Baby*) that appear to increase in accordance with modernising forces. There must be an onus that encourages perceptions which focus on decentralisation, deconstruction, and dematerialism in order to create even development between core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral nations. This must be rooted in consciousness and freedom from the saturation of state and corporate stimulus so as to equalise the platform for voices

to punctuate the global dialogue in contemporary literature, culture, and the arts.

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